**Headline:** How Biden Protected Workers During the Debt Ceiling Fight

By Tom Conway

**Author Bio:** Tom Conway is the international president of the [United Steelworkers Union (USW)](https://www.usw.org/).

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**[Article Body:]**

Joel Buchanan owns his home, travels, [donates to charitable causes](https://m.usw.org/news/media-center/articles/2021/soar-usw-cares-jefferson-award-winner-joel-buchanan), and still has more than enough money to pay his bills on time—thanks in large part to Social Security.

Along with his union pension, it means the difference between enjoying his golden years or just scraping by.

Even so, the Pueblo, Colorado, resident refused to panic in May 2023 as right-wing Republicans in the House of Representatives [attempted to extort massive spending cuts](https://newrepublic.com/post/172946/matt-gaetz-admits-republicans-holding-america-hostage-debt-ceiling) in exchange for the votes needed to raise America’s debt ceiling and avert global financial calamity.

The Republicans’ recklessness threatened tens of millions of working people. But Buchanan, a member of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR), trusted President Joe Biden to counter extremism with reason and save the day with steady-handed statesmanship.

That’s exactly what happened.

Biden, a Democrat, [reached across the aisle](https://www.npr.org/2023/05/29/1178660890/biden-and-mccarthy-reach-a-deal-to-avoid-default-heres-whats-in-it#:~:text=The%20bill%20would%20hold%20nondefense,until%20Jan.%201%2C%202025.) and struck a deal with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy that protects Social Security and other lifelines while raising the debt ceiling for two years and safeguarding the world economy.

McCarthy himself credited Biden with saving Social Security and Medicare, saying he “[walled off](https://americanindependent.com/mccarthy-biden-stopped-cutting-social-security-medicare/)” any discussion about slashing them.

Yet Biden wasn’t finished. He [worked the phones](https://www.nysun.com/article/biden-working-the-phones-urging-lawmakers-to-pass-debt-limit-deal-as-key-committee-vote-looms) and helped to line up the bipartisan votes needed to pass the deal through both chambers, even as some members of McCarthy’s own party [made clear that they’d prefer to let the nation default on its debts](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/31/us/politics/chip-roy-debt-ceiling-deal.html) than give up demands to slash essential programs.

The [House](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/31/us/politics/debt-ceiling-house-vote.html) passed the deal May 31, and the [Senate](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/06/01/senate-debt-ceiling-bill/) followed suit the following day. Biden noted that the legislation “[protects key priorities](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/31/statement-from-president-joe-biden-on-house-passage-of-the-bipartisan-budget-agreement/) and accomplishments.”

“He was the adult in the room. He’s done his job,” Buchanan said of Biden, who previously served as a U.S. senator for Delaware. “He’s spent much of his life in Congress. He knows how to get things done on Capitol Hill.”

Biden confronted the Republican-manufactured crisis with the same skill that enabled him to deliver [historic investments in America’s infrastructure](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/12/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-kicks-off-infrastructure-week-by-highlighting-tremendous-progress-rebuilding-americas-infrastructure-18-months-in/#:~:text=While%20%E2%80%9CInfrastructure%20Week%E2%80%9D%20became%20a,pipes%20to%20provide%20clean%20water%2C)—the package includes [billions](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Colorado-BIL-State-Fact-Sheet-Nov-22.pdf) for Colorado alone—and ramp up the production of semiconductors to [safeguard national security](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/09/fact-sheet-chips-and-science-act-will-lower-costs-create-jobs-strengthen-supply-chains-and-counter-china/).

And his approach to the debt ceiling reflected the same unwavering commitment to ordinary people that he demonstrated in [capping insulin costs](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/03/02/fact-sheet-president-bidens-cap-on-the-cost-of-insulin-could-benefit-millions-of-americans-in-all-50-states/) for seniors, enforcing [workers’ labor rights](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/03/17/the-white-house-task-force-on-worker-organizing-and-empowermentupdate-on-implementation-of-approved-actions/), and [saving dozens of failing pension plans](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/12/08/fact-sheet-president-biden-announces-historic-relief-to-protect-hard-earned-pensions-of-hundreds-of-thousands-of-union-workers-and-retirees/#:~:text=The%20American%20Rescue%20Plan's%20Special%20Financial%20Assistance%20program%20is%20providing,the%20full%20benefits%20they%20earned.) that cover more than a million Americans.

While Biden cooperated with congressional Democrats to protect working people and strengthen the nation, Republicans aimed to inflict as much harm and pain as possible.

“We default and crash the whole system?” Buchanan asked about the Republicans’ thinking. “Where’s that going to leave us? It doesn’t make much sense to me what they’re trying to do.

“First of all, this shouldn’t even be an issue right now. We have to pay our bills,” Buchanan said of the debt ceiling, noting that many of the same Republicans feigning concern over America’s spending also voted for the 2017 tax cuts that [provided windfalls to corporations and the rich](https://www.americanprogress.org/article/tax-cuts-are-primarily-responsible-for-the-increasing-debt-ratio/) while jacking up the nation’s debt.

Biden [staved off](https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/30/politics/whats-in-the-debt-ceiling-deal/index.html#:~:text=The%20package%20will%20repurpose%20%2410,sides%20have%20agreed%20to%20it.) the extremists’ demands for [devastating cuts](https://nhsa.org/press_release/debt-limit-legislation-irreparable-damage/) across numerous federal departments—proposals with the potential to [kick tens of thousands of disadvantaged children out of Head Start](https://www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/local/debt-ceiling-budget-cuts-fuel-fears-of-head-start-loss-for-children-in-connecticut/3026204/), end Meals on Wheels for many [struggling seniors](https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/learn-more/national/press-room/news/2023/04/26/meals-on-wheels-america-alarmed-by-harmful-funding-cuts-in-house-bill-to-raise-the-debt-limit), and slash housing support amid the nation’s [growing battle](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/15/briefing/homelessness-america-housing-crisis.html) with homelessness, among many other threats.

And the Republicans [brazenly schemed to cut Social Security and Medicare](https://www.americanprogress.org/article/gop-members-of-congress-threaten-debt-limit-default-to-cut-social-security-and-medicare/), outraging Buchanan, who began paying into the system when he was 16.

The Economic Policy Institute, a think tank in Washington, D.C., recently released a study noting that “millions of people are entering their retirement years with [insufficient savings to cover basic expenses](https://www.epi.org/publication/older-workers-difficult-jobs/) and medical bills.” The study called for expanding Social Security, not cutting it.

Yet McCarthy just announced a new [commission](https://gazette.com/news/us-world/mccarthy-will-convene-a-new-commission-to-tackle-federal-budget/article_a12a0abd-3220-50c1-b4f2-fa59956eeb23.html) “to look at the entire budget.” He [continues kowtowing](https://www.salon.com/2023/06/01/this-isnt-the-end-mccarthy-takes-aim-at-social-security-medicare-after-debt-ceiling-deal_partner/) to the extremists in his party, including Buchanan’s own representative, Lauren Boebert, who [opposed the deal](https://coloradonewsline.com/briefs/colorado-republicans-lauren-boebert-ken-buck-against-debt-ceiling-bill/) to raise the debt ceiling but [did not even show up](https://www.newsweek.com/full-list-republicans-voted-against-kevin-mccarthy-debt-deal-1803683#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20House%20of%20Representatives,bill%2C%20missed%20the%20vote%20entirely.) for the vote.

“She’s down in Florida, visiting the former president, or down in Texas, complaining about the border, and leaves our issues behind. She doesn’t do anything,” Buchanan said, describing her as out of touch with seniors and other Coloradans.

While Republicans seek to cut programs supporting average people, they give a pass to the richest Americans who refuse to pay their fair share.

The biggest earners [represent a third of the nation’s unpaid taxes](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/03/26/wealthy-tax-evasion/), costing the country $175 billion a year. Fortunately, Biden’s debt-ceiling deal [saved funds](https://rollcall.com/2023/06/05/irs-budget-battle-not-over-after-debt-ceiling-agreement/) allocated to ramp up enforcement and [root out](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2023/01/26/cutting-irs-funding-is-a-gift-to-americas-wealthiest-tax-evaders/) wealthy tax cheats.

Without efficient and fair tax collection, “How are we going to pay for things?” noted Priscilla Marco, president of a statewide SOAR chapter in New York.

Marco, an activist who’s long supported pro-worker candidates, said the Republican attempts to hurt working families and damage the economy underscore the need to place the right people in public office.

“We have to have more Democrats elected at the national level, and then we can have a different conversation,” observed Marco, who recently worked on a petition drive to save Social Security and Medicare.

“This is the best deal he could get given the circumstances,” she said of Biden. “He and his people delivered.”